

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
American Solar Energy Society
Solar Action Alert
August 15, 2003

Many ASES members in the Northeast have been affected by the power blackout that occurred yesterday and is still continuing in many areas. ASES' Chapter local to that area, the Northeast Solar Energy Association (NESEA), promptly sent out an alert to members of their network and graciously permitted ASES to forward it on to the rest of our membership. The alert is reproduced below with one or two ASES additions.

SUMMARY

On Thursday, August 14, the northeastern and mid-western U.S. experienced the largest blackout in this country's history. Mass transit systems ground to a halt, oil refineries were forced to shut down, the FAA stopped flights into airports, nuclear reactors were taken offline, and millions were left without power. The blackouts affected approximately 50 million people over a 9,300-square-mile area. New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg told reporters, "All of a sudden, a few things weren't working and then you realized how dependent we are on electricity."

Yesterday's events cascaded out of control because the grid was stressed by high air-conditioning demand from the heat. Almost the entire United States was at temperatures near or above 90 degrees. Because of this enormous energy load it did not take much of a trigger to send the energy delivery system down. As one would expect during hot weather, the solar resource was excellent and nearly ideal in most of the stressed regions of the country. A dispersed base of solar energy could have reduced the overall delivery system stress and lowered the risk of catastrophic failure.

Thursday's blackouts were a wake-up call, reminding us that North America's electrical grid is a dysfunctional system that requires dramatic changes. Rising electricity consumption is a significant factor in the instability of the grid. Yet energy-saving products and technologies are widely available. More efficient appliances, compact fluorescent lights, better-constructed buildings, and forms of renewable energy such as solar and wind power can dramatically reduce the amount of electricity we draw from the grid and in most cases ultimately save us money.

While electricity is on the public's mind and in the press, please use this opportunity to write a letter to the editor of your local paper about the benefits of renewable energy and energy efficiency. This is also an opportune moment to remind people that the instability of the power grid is only one of many reasons why we need to change our energy system. For example, if we use less electricity and get more of the electricity we use from solar, wind, and fuel cells distributed locally, it will also slow global warming and reduce air pollution. Below are a couple of sample messages to help get you started.

SAMPLE KEY STATEMENTS

- We can improve the electricity generation and distribution system and help avoid blackouts by using less electricity and producing power independently through renewable energy, such as wind and solar.
- Now is the time for America to commit to using less electricity and to speeding the installation of distributed energy systems, such as rooftop solar panels, fuel cells, and small wind turbines. Not only would this decrease the likelihood of future blackouts, but it would slow global warming and reduce air pollution.

- If everyone in our community were to replace one of their old appliances with a new energy-efficient one, we could significantly reduce our reliance on the electrical grid and help avoid blackouts such as the one that recently affected 50 million people.
- The solar panels on my home provide independent, clean electricity that doesn't contribute to blackouts.

HOW TO WRITE A SUCCESSFUL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

There is a good chance that your local newspaper will run a letter from you if it is tied into the recent blackouts. The chances of getting your letter in print are much greater at smaller, weekly newspapers (some of these run virtually all the letters they receive), but, depending upon the letter, it may be worth trying a larger daily paper.

Send your letter to the editorial page editor, with a cover note making it clear that you are requesting that the letter be included in the letters-to-the-editor section of the newspaper. Offer to provide more information. Make sure to include your address and phone number, so that the editor will know how to contact you for verification or further information.

Your letter will have a much greater chance of appearing if it is short (no more than 150 words), personal, and clearly linked to the local community. Focus on making one major point, rather than raising lots of issues.

It is neither necessary nor desirable to mention your connection to NESEA and the NESEA Network. It is more useful to tie the letter into any personal or professional experience you have with the subject of your letter.

Aim to get the letter to the newspaper at least one week before you would like it to appear.

Please let us know if you take action! Just send an email message to NESEANetwork@nesea.org with a copy of your letter and the name and location of the newspaper to which you submitted it.

RELATED MEDIA STORIES

Blackout hits 50 million in U.S., Canada, Philadelphia Inquirer, 8/15/03
<http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/6535866.htm>

Blackout hits Northeast; thousands here lose power, Buffalo News, 8/15/03
<http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial/20030815/1049648.asp>

Great blackout of '03, Boston Globe, 8/15/2003
http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2003/08/15/great_blackout_of_03_boston_globe

Various coverage, New York Times, 8/15/03
<http://www.nytimes.com>

Various coverage, Newsday.com, 8/15/03
<http://www.newsday.com>

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